

PEER REVIEW AND PEER INVOLVEMENT AT THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

This document establishes the policy of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for peer review of scientifically and technically based work products, including economic and social science products, that are intended to inform Agency decisions. Peer review, a form of *peer involvement*, is one process through which EPA staff augment their capabilities by inviting independent subject-matter experts to provide objective evaluation of the work product.

PEER REVIEW

EPA strives to ensure that the scientific and technical bases of its decisions meet two important criteria: (1) they are based upon the best current knowledge from science, engineering, and other domains of technical expertise; and (2) they are credible. Peer review, a process based on the principles of obtaining the best technical and scientific expertise with appropriate independence, is central to sound science and helps the Agency meet these important criteria. Peer review occurs when scientifically and technically based work products are evaluated by relevant experts who were not involved in creating the product. Properly applied, peer review not only enriches the quality of work products but also adds a degree of credibility that cannot be achieved in any other way. Furthermore, peer review early in the development of work products in some cases may conserve future resources by steering the development along the most efficacious course.

Peer review generally takes one of two approaches:

- Internal, in which the reviewers are independent experts from inside EPA.
- External, in which the reviewers are independent experts from outside EPA.

POLICY STATEMENT

Peer review of all scientific and technical information that is intended to inform or support Agency decisions is encouraged and expected. Influential scientific information, including highly influential scientific assessments, should be peer reviewed in accordance with the Agency's Peer Review Handbook. All Agency managers are accountable for ensuring that Agency policy and guidance are appropriately applied in determining if their work products are influential or highly influential, and for deciding the nature, scope, and timing of their peer review. For highly influential scientific assessments, external peer review is the expected procedure. For influential scientific information intended to support important decisions, or for work products that have special importance in their own right, external peer review is the approach of choice. Peer review is not restricted to the nearly final version of work products; in fact, peer review at the planning stage can often be extremely beneficial.

LEGAL EFFECT

This policy statement does not establish or affect legal rights or obligations. Rather, it confirms the importance of peer review where appropriate, outlines relevant principles, and identifies factors Agency staff should consider in implementing the policy. On a continuing basis, Agency management is expected to evaluate the policy as well as the results of its application throughout the Agency and undertake revisions as necessary. Therefore, the policy does not stand alone; nor does it establish a binding norm that is finally determinative of the issues addressed.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Science Policy Council is responsible for overseeing Agency-wide implementation of this policy, including: promoting consistent interpretation; assessing Agency-wide progress; developing recommendations for revisions of the policy as necessary; and issuing the *Peer Review Handbook*, which provides additional information and procedures on implementing this policy. Assistant Administrators, Regional Administrators, and other senior managers remain ultimately responsible for ensuring the appropriate application of Agency policy and guidance in identifying work products subject to peer review, determining the type and timing of such review, documenting the process and outcome of each peer review, ensuring that the Science Inventory is kept current, and otherwise implementing the policy within their organizational units.

The policy is effective immediately.

APPROVED:

STEPHEN L. JOHNSON, ADMINISTRATOR



DATE:

JAN 31 2006